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Security Council

Sixty-first year

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5493rd meeting

Friday, 21 July 2006, 11 a.m.

New York

President:	Mr. De La Sabliere	(France)
Members:	Argentina	Mr. Mayoral
	China	Mr. Liu Zhenmin
	Congo	Mr. Ikouebe
	Denmark	Ms. Løj
	Ghana	Nana Effah-Apenteng
	Greece	Mr. Vassilakis
	Japan	Mr. Oshima
	Peru	Mr. De Rivero
	Qatar	Mr. Al-Nasser
	Russian Federation	Mr. Churkin
	Slovakia	Mr. Burian
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Ms. Pierce
	United Republic of Tanzania	Mrs. Taj
	United States of America	Mr. Bolton

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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06-43869 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 11.25 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

The President (*spoke in French*): I should like to inform the Council that I have received letters from the representatives of Algeria, Australia, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Cuba, Djibouti, Egypt, Finland, Guatemala, India, Indonesia, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Malaysia, Morocco, New Zealand, Norway, Saudi Arabia, the Sudan, Switzerland, the Syrian Arab Republic, Turkey and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela in which they request to be invited to participate in the consideration of the item on the Council's agenda. In conformity with the usual practice, I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite those representatives to participate in the consideration of the item, without the right to vote, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Charter and rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

At the invitation of the President, Mr. Gillerman (Israel) took a seat at the Council table; the representatives of the other aforementioned countries took the seats reserved for them at the side of the Council Chamber.

The President (*spoke in French*): I should like to inform the Council that I have received a letter dated 19 July 2006 from the Chargé d'affaires ad interim of the Permanent Observer Mission of Palestine to the United Nations, which will be issued as document S/2006/553, and which reads as follows:

> "I have the honour to request that, in accordance with its previous practice, the Security Council invite the Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations to participate in the meeting of the Council that will be held on Friday, 21 July 2006, regarding the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question."

I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite the Permanent Observer of Palestine to participate in the meeting in accordance with the provisional rules of procedure and the previous practice in this regard.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

At the invitation of the President, Mr. Mansour (Palestine) took a seat at the Council table.

The President (*spoke in French*): In accordance with the understanding reached in the Council's prior consultations, I shall take it that the Security Council agrees to extend an invitation under rule 39 of its provisional rules of procedure to Mr. Vijay Nambiar, Special Adviser to the Secretary-General.

It is so decided.

In accordance with the understanding reached in the Council's prior consultations, I shall take it that the Security Council agrees to extend an invitation under rule 39 of its provisional rules of procedure to Mr. Jan Egeland, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator.

It is so decided.

I should like to inform the Council that I have received a letter dated 20 July 2006 from the representative of Qatar, in which he requests that an invitation be extended, pursuant to rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, to His Excellency Mr. Yahya Mahmassani, Permanent Observer of the League of Arab States to the United Nations, to participate in the consideration of the item on the Council's agenda.

If I hear no objection, I shall take it that the Security Council agrees to extend an invitation under rule 39 of its provisional rules of procedure to Mr. Yahya Mahmassani.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

I invite Mr. Mahmassani to take the seat reserved for him at the side of the Council Chamber.

I should like to inform the Council that I have received a letter dated 21 July 2006 from His Excellency Mr. Paul Badji, representative of Senegal, in which he requests to be invited, in his capacity as Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, to participate in the consideration of the item on the Council's agenda.

If I hear no objection, I shall take it that the Security Council agrees to extend an invitation under rule 39 of its provisional rules of procedure to Mr. Paul Badji.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

I invite Mr. Badji to take the seat reserved for him at the side of the Council Chamber.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda. The Council is meeting in accordance with the understanding reached in its prior consultations.

I wish to draw the attention of members of the Council to letters from Israel, contained in documents S/2006/436, 463, 485, 502 and 515; letters from Palestine, contained in documents S/2006/443, 460, 479, 489, 499, 501, 519, 538 and 554; a letter from the Syrian Arab Republic, contained in document S/2006/459; letters from the Islamic Republic of Iran, contained in documents S/2006/475, 546 and 549; letters from Malaysia, contained in documents S/2006/491 and 548; a letter from Finland, contained in document S/2006/511; and letters from Lebanon, contained in documents S/2006/518, 522, 528, 529, 531, 536, 537 and 550.

I would like to welcome the Secretary-General, His Excellency Mr. Kofi Annan.

I shall now give the floor to Mr. Vijay Nambiar, Special Adviser to the Secretary-General.

Mr. Nambiar: As the Council is aware, I led a mission dispatched by the Secretary-General to the Middle East late last week to explore ways of defusing the crisis in the region. I am pleased to be here today with the other members of my team, Mr. Alvaro de Soto and Mr. Terje Roed-Larsen, to report.

Before briefing the Council on our mission, it is my duty first to provide a Secretariat overview of developments since the last monthly briefing to the Security Council by my colleague, Mr. Ibrahim Gambari.

Efforts of mediators to obtain the release of the Israeli soldier captured on 25 June have been unsuccessful to date. Israel's military operation to secure his return and to prevent rocket attacks from Gaza continues. In the course of this operation, the Israeli air force has fired missiles from the air at alleged militants in cars and into residential buildings where they were said to be sheltering. Installations that service the civilian population, including the main power plant and bridges, have been damaged or destroyed by bombardment. Israeli Defence Force tanks also took positions more than one kilometre into the northern, central and southern Strip. The violence is continuing. Today, a family of five was killed when an Israeli tank fired at a house in Gaza, which is at least the second time in the reporting period that many members of a family have been killed.

The Prime Minister's office and the buildings of the Palestinian Authority's Foreign, Interior and National Economy Ministries have been hit by Israeli missiles. In addition, 64 Palestinian Authority officials, including 8 ministers and 21 legislators, have been arrested.

During the reporting period, Palestinian militants fired over 200 rockets from Gaza into southern Israel, striking a number of population centres, including a schoolyard in central Ashkelon.

At least 147 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli forces in Gaza and the West Bank, at least 15 of whom were children. More than 450 Palestinians have been injured, at least half of them children. Five Israelis have been killed and at least 25 injured by Palestinian militants, including in rocket attacks.

On the humanitarian front, Israel's destruction of parts of the Gaza power station has left 1.4 million Palestinians without electricity for between 12 and 18 hours a day and has left municipalities reliant on generators. Water is now rationed at each of the districts, and public health is already suffering, with indications of insufficient access to clean drinking water. Significant destruction was caused to public and private infrastructure, agricultural land and crops.

Access into and out of Gaza continues to be severely restricted. Rafah, the only exit for Palestinians, reopened for arrivals on 18 July, having been closed since 25 June. On 15 July, between 1,000 and 5,000 Palestinians who had been stranded in and near the terminal were able to enter the Gaza Strip through a hole that was blown in the fence by unidentified militants. Karny Crossing has been regularly opened from 12 July onwards for limited periods during the day and for imports only. There have been no goods exported from Gaza since 25 June. Access of United Nations staff to the Gaza Strip is also heavily restricted.

Meanwhile, a temporary international mechanism is being developed. The second window, which provides fuel support costs for the Gaza power plant and other facilities, started on 11 July with the first transfer by the European Union of 300,000 litres of fuel for hospital generators in Gaza.

Last Friday, at a donor meeting in Geneva on the humanitarian situation, many donors said that they would make significant contributions to the revised, consolidated appeal, especially to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East.

I should add that, on 27 June, Fatah and Hamas reached an agreement on a revised version of the so-called Prisoners' Document on which to base the National Unity Government and reform of the Palestine Liberation Organization. During our meeting with him on 18 July, President Abbas stated that efforts to put in place such a Government are on hold due to the crisis.

I will not report in any detail on the situation in Lebanon and Israel in view of the regular briefings the Council is receiving and the briefing by the Secretary-General yesterday. Suffice it to say that, as of yesterday evening, the conflict had claimed the lives of over 300 Lebanese and 34 Israelis, while injuring over 500 Lebanese and approximately 200 Israelis.

The United Nations has dispatched experts to Lebanon to support the Government and agencies already on the ground in addressing the humanitarian needs of the Lebanese, particularly those in the south, who have been most affected. In extremely difficult circumstances, the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon has established joint coordination centres in two locations. However, it has had severe restrictions imposed on its freedom of movement due to the intense fighting that continues and lack of safe passage. The destruction of important roads and bridges in southern Lebanon has made access extremely difficult, if not impossible, in certain cases. It is urgent that the Israeli Government extend its full cooperation by immediately ensuring humanitarian access to those in need.

That concludes the brief overview of monthly developments. I come now to my mission.

I first want to thank the Governments of the United Kingdom and Spain for their generous support of the mission, without which it would not have been possible to cover the ground we did in such a short time.

Upon arrival in Cairo on 14 July, the team met with the Foreign Ministers of Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia and Qatar, as well as the personal envoy of the President of the Palestinian Authority and the Secretary-General of the League of Arab States. I would like to extend my gratitude to all these leaders for their graciousness in receiving me and the members of my team.

The mission proceeded on 16 July to Beirut via Cyprus, where it had the opportunity to consult en route with the European High Representative for Foreign and Security Policy. In Beirut, the mission met twice, on 16 and 17 July, with Prime Minister Fouad Siniora and Speaker of the Parliament Nabih Berri. Both the Prime Minister and the Speaker expressed great pain and frustration over the scope of Israel's military actions in Lebanon, which they said were causing misery to the ordinary people of the country and inflicting serious damage on Lebanon's infrastructure and future economic capacity. Both were almost incredulous that Israel would carry out actions that would, in their view, inevitably help Hizbollah in the long run by increasing misery and radicalizing public opinion. Both pressed for an immediate ceasefire and for action from the international community to assist in achieving it.

Prime Minister Siniora said that as things stood he was not in a position to negotiate a ceasefire himself, as he had no involvement in the initiation or continuation of Hizbollah's attacks, which his Government had disavowed.

Prime Minister Siniora reaffirmed his support for the full implementation of all relevant Security Council resolutions. He stressed that Israel's activities were making it more difficult for the Government of Lebanon to act to implement them and to have a Lebanese consensus behind doing so.

The mission left Beirut on 17 July for Israel, where it met the next day with Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni, Vice-Prime Minister Peres and a number of other senior officials. All interlocutors stressed Hizbollah's responsibility for initiating the conflict, as well as its continuing terror attacks against Israeli population centres by long-range rockets. They also

said that Hizbollah was financed, armed and supported by Syria and Iran.

They made clear that Israel had decided that military operations would continue until Hizbollah was seriously weakened; this was not, as in the past, a response to a particular incident — the abduction of the two soldiers — but was a definitive response to an unacceptable strategic threat posed by Hizbollah and a message to Iran and Syria that threats by proxies would no longer be tolerated. It was stated that the Israeli captives must be unconditionally released and that, this time, Israel was not prepared to negotiate with Hizbollah through third parties, which in the past had led to prisoner exchanges.

Israeli interlocutors stressed that they were seeking to minimize civilian casualties and damage to Government and public infrastructure, and accused Hizbollah of resorting to tactics that made it inevitable that civilians would be in the firing line when Israel acted to defend itself. Both Prime Minister Olmert and Foreign Minister Livni stressed that once they felt that Hizbollah had been weakened sufficiently not to pose an immediate terror threat to the citizens of Israel, they would welcome a political framework that ensured no return to the status quo ante and would facilitate the implementation of Security Council resolution 1559 (2004).

From the mission's consultations, it became clear that there are serious obstacles to the achievement of a comprehensive ceasefire in the immediate future. However, the mission sees two vital political goals for the international community in the days ahead.

The first goal is to secure, urgently, some form of cessation of hostilities. This is essential so that captives are protected and released, humanitarian access is ensured, civilian casualties are dramatically reduced, and the political space is opened to negotiate a full and durable ceasefire.

The second goal is to develop quickly the elements of a political framework that would pave the way for a full and durable ceasefire. A return to the situation as it existed prior to the Hizbollah attack on 12 July is untenable. A political package is needed that gives the Governments of Israel and of Lebanon confidence that the horrors each country is now enduring will not be repeated – the end of the Hizbollah threat against Israel, and the full respect by all Lebanese parties and all Lebanon's neighbours of the Government of Lebanon's sovereignty and control. It is difficult to envisage a sustainable ceasefire without such a political framework.

The team discussed with the parties a number of elements that might provide a framework to end the crisis. Yesterday the Secretary-General outlined these in his briefing to the Council.

I should stress that, in developing these ideas and conducting initial consultations on them with the parties, it was made clear that these would require further discussion and elaboration.

It was also pointed out that the planning and implementation of these elements should, as far as possible, be done in parallel.

In responding to these ideas, Prime Minister Siniora was clear that any steps to defuse the crisis required an internal Lebanese consensus. However, he stressed repeatedly that he now felt that any process to reassert the sovereignty of the Government of Lebanon over the entire country must address what he termed the "core issues", such as the issue of Sheba'a Farms.

For their part, Prime Minister Olmert and Foreign Minister Livni were adamant that the prisoners must be returned, unconditionally, and not made part of a negotiating process. They would consider any proposal that would help guarantee that Israel would not be vulnerable to terrorist rocket attack along its northern border, through the Government of Lebanon deploying in the south and the disarmament of Hizbollah and other militant groups.

I wish to add that, on my way back from the region, the team met the Spanish Foreign Minister. It also met this morning the Secretary of State of the United States in advance of her visit to the region.

Before concluding this briefing, allow me to add a few words about our consultations with President Abbas in Gaza. As the Secretary-General reported yesterday, apart from the deep humanitarian and security crisis that affects the people of Gaza every day, President Abbas focused our attention on the need for a political path forward.

He was particularly concerned that the current crisis in Lebanon involved, among other things, an attempt by non-Palestinian extremists to hijack leadership on the Palestinian issue. He felt it was important to de-link the crises and for the Palestinian

issue to be addressed, urgently and creatively, on its merits. He left us with a powerful impression that the international community has work to do in assisting the parties to develop a credible political framework that can show the path towards what the G-8 calls the root cause of the problems of the region — the absence of a comprehensive Middle East peace.

The Secretary-General and the Secretariat are working on the political, peacekeeping and humanitarian fronts to respond to this deep regional crisis. We would welcome a united stance by the Security Council.

The President (*spoke in French*): I shall now give the floor to Mr. Jan Egeland, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator.

Mr. Egeland: On behalf of the humanitarian workers of the United Nations system, I wish to thank the Security Council for its continued interest in and support for our work.

The war, the terror and the attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure have to stop in Lebanon and northern Israel, as they have to stop in Gaza. Too many children, women and elderly people, as well as other civilians, have already lost their lives or are struggling to survive their wounds.

The United Nations humanitarian agencies would again want to repeat the appeal of our Secretary-General for an immediate cessation of hostilities. This is the only way civilians can truly be protected and humanitarian work can become effective as we try to reach the civilian populations.

With the conflict in Lebanon now in its second week, the humanitarian crisis continues to worsen. The most severely affected areas are southern Lebanon, Beirut and the Beka'a Valley. More than 300 people have reportedly been killed and 1,000 wounded. A third of the casualties are reportedly children.

In northern Israel, rockets continue to rain down on civilians and civilian infrastructure, with some 30 persons killed and 200 wounded, including children.

In Lebanon, there is widespread destruction of public infrastructure, including residential housing, health facilities, schools, roads, bridges, fuel storage, airports and seaports.

Of concern for future humanitarian relief operations is the destruction of roads and bridges linking Beirut to the populations of southern Lebanon. As a result of the targeting of petrol stations and fuel-storage facilities, it is estimated that Beirut has only days of fuel supplies remaining.

Access problems are severely hampering humanitarian action. It is either too unsafe or physically impossible, due to destruction, to move relief supplies into or around large parts of the country. There are sufficient food supplies, including wheat stocks, to cover national consumption for one or possibly up to three months. The primary concern is the disruption to food supply chains and the ability of the local population to purchase food from functional markets.

In the cities, hospitals are functioning, but they are overwhelmed by the number of wounded and are suffering from power outages. Too many critically ill and wounded persons cannot, however, reach hospitals in time, as they are blocked by the bombardments or road destruction. With the number of people in shelters increasing, access to safe drinking water is also a growing concern. Some reports suggest that small dispensaries and clinics in the south of the country are beginning to run out of medicines. The Lebanese Government has requested international humanitarian assistance and has appealed for medical supplies, materials for shelter and construction, tents, blankets, generators and firefighting equipment.

While figures as to affected populations remain only indicative, current planning figures suggest that there are more than a half million conflict-affected people, including the internally displaced and those unable to relocate. More than one third of those affected are children. There may still be some 115,000 third-country nationals from some 20 countries in Lebanon. It has been reported that there are more than 100,000 Lebanese now located in Syria, many of whom need assistance.

The United Nations humanitarian agencies are increasing our capacity to respond on the ground inside Lebanon. UNICEF has strengthened its capacity in Lebanon to conduct assessments, in particular of schools that are being used as temporary shelters for displaced people. Key needs there include lack of water, sanitation and health care. UNICEF is also preparing to deliver critical emergency supplies in the

areas of essential drugs, water, sanitation and recreation. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is undertaking border monitoring in countries surrounding Lebanon, for refugee outflows, and has pre-positioned stockpiles of emergency shelter material in Jordan and Syria.

In Beirut, UNHCR is assisting refugees, asylum-seekers and internally displaced persons, helping them to get access to public shelters and assistance. UNHCR has a presence in three mountain areas and is also in beleaguered Sidon, in the south. The World Food Programme (WFP) has arranged for food loans to Lebanon and has pre-positioned food supplies ready to be deployed. A humanitarian logistics capacity is being set up to meet the food needs of the displaced people, taking into account the food aid activities of other partners.

The World Health Organization (WHO) emergency staff is undertaking health assessments and monitoring health threats, with a special focus on the most vulnerable groups and areas. WHO is supporting the Lebanese Ministry of Health and coordinating with health partners. WHO also aims to establish public health services for displaced populations and provide emergency supplies.

Colleagues from the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) have also established joint coordination centres for humanitarian activities in Tyre and Marjayoun. They have successfully dispatched convoys with humanitarian aid to some affected villages.

The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) have deployed a three-person coordination support team to Lebanon, which will work closely with the resident coordinator and the country team. We are also looking into deploying civil military coordination officers to the area. Our colleagues from the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the Lebanese Red Cross are undertaking a big and very impressive operation.

My colleagues and I have consistently called upon all parties to the conflict to live up to their obligations under international humanitarian law and to grant access to humanitarian workers and relief items to those most affected by the hostilities.

Yesterday I had the opportunity to hand over to the Israeli Permanent Representative here present a formal request to the Government of Israel. Today I could do the same to the Lebanese representative. The request calls for the acceptance and guarantee of safe passage routes — so-called humanitarian corridors — into and out of Lebanon, privileging land-bound humanitarian convoys and supplies via the northern border town of Aarida — indicated on the map before the Council — sea-bound cargo via the ports of Beirut, Tripoli and Tyre, and air-bound cargo via Beirut's Rafik Hariri International Airport.

Additionally, within Lebanon, including in the south, we are urgently asking for the opening of humanitarian corridors for the distribution of urgently needed relief items and the deployment of humanitarian workers. From the indicated entry points, this will then be distributed to the people most in need. For that purpose, we have already identified cargo consolidation points and requested the parties involved to identify focal points in their government and military forces who will discuss the modalities and technical aspects of that concept.

Our country team, with the support of OCHA, is currently in Beirut working to produce a flash appeal that will address the most pressing humanitarian concerns for a period of three months. We ask for your generous and immediate contributions to this appeal, which will be launched on Monday.

At the request of the Secretary-General, I will be travelling to Lebanon this afternoon, where I will be able to assess the humanitarian situation, consult with humanitarian colleagues and the Government. On Monday, I will launch the flash appeal there, and at the same time here in New York, where donors will be asked to come. I will then travel to Jerusalem for consultations with the Israeli authorities. I also hope to visit Gaza. As my colleague Mr. Nambiar has said, the situation in Gaza remains as critical as ever. After that, I intend to report back to the Council, with its kind permission, next Friday, 28 July.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank Mr. Egeland for his briefing.

In accordance with the understanding reached among Council members, may I remind all speakers to limit their statements to no more than five minutes, in order to enable the Council to carry out its work expeditiously. Delegations with lengthy statements are

strongly urged to circulate the full text in writing and to deliver a condensed version when speaking in the Chamber.

I now give the floor to the Permanent Observer of Palestine.

Mr. Mansour (Palestine): It has been a little over a week since we last met in the Council to adopt a reasonable and balanced draft resolution intended to bring a halt to Israel's military aggression against the Palestinian civilian population in the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem, calm the situation on the ground and ensure respect for international law by all parties.

It is important to note that the elements contained in the draft resolution supported by the great majority of Council members were relevant then and remain relevant today. Regrettably, the inaction of the Security Council in that regard has only further bolstered Israel's perception that it is immune from the law and that it will not be held accountable for its illegal actions.

The result has been the continuation of Israel's military onslaught, as well as its expansion, leading to even greater destruction and more human losses among the besieged and devastated Palestinian civilian population in the occupied Palestinian territories, particularly in the Gaza Strip, as well as in Lebanon.

As the international community stands idly by, with the Security Council nearly paralysed, Israel, the occupying Power, continues to kill, wound and maim defenceless Palestinian civilians, including women and children, in grave breach of international law, including international humanitarian law and human rights law. In that regard, there is no question that war crimes and State terror are being committed by the occupying Power on a daily basis in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem.

Over the past three weeks, Israel, the occupying Power, has relentlessly carried out a series of lethal military assaults using all sorts of heavy weaponry to forge ahead with its maniacal, excessive and indiscriminate use of force, extrajudicial executions and State terror against the Palestinian civilian population, held captive under its brutal occupation. In the span of just three weeks, the Palestinian death toll has tragically risen to over 100 people, including many women and children. As the Secretary-General rightly stated in his briefing to the Council yesterday, the majority of those killed have been civilians. In fact, according to the most recent report by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), published on 18 July 2006, 16 of the more than 100 persons killed were children. In addition, the number of Palestinians injured has climbed to 300. According to the same OCHA report, Israeli occupying forces have fired over 1,000 artillery shells and have carried out 168 aerial bombardments against the Gaza Strip and its defenceless population during the same span of time.

There are far too many examples of the brutality being unleashed against the Palestinian people by the occupying forces. I therefore wish only to recall but one horrific incident in that regard to illustrate the current plight of the Palestinian people during these ongoing military assaults.

On 12 July 2006, during the pre-dawn hours in the Gaza Strip, an F-16 warplane dropped a 550-pound bomb on a home in the heavily populated Sheikh Radwan neighbourhood in Gaza City. That deliberate attack, which was declared by the occupying Power to have been launched for the purpose of assassinating high-ranking Hamas officials, resulted in the massacre of nine Palestinian civilians, all members of the same family — the father, mother and their seven children — in their own home. That is but one example of State terrorism and war crimes being committed by Israel, the occupying Power, against the Palestinian civilian population, for whom there is clearly nowhere to be safe from Israel's military rampage and blatant disregard for human life.

In the most recent example of Israel's aggression against the Palestinian people, which took place over the past 48 hours, a total of 23 Palestinians, including five children, were killed by Israeli occupying forces. During the same period over 140 Palestinian civilians were injured, many of whom remain in critical condition.

An undercover unit of the Israeli occupying forces, backed by heavy armoured vehicles, bulldozers, helicopters and unmanned drones, attacked the Palestinian refugee population of Al-Maghazi refugee camp, in central Gaza, resulting in the deaths of at least 16 Palestinians, including two children.

In another military assault, Israeli occupying forces entered the West Bank town of Nablus from

three directions and destroyed the Palestinian security compound — Al-Muqata — and killed seven more Palestinians and injured scores of Palestinian civilians. During the same military attack on Nablus and its inhabitants Israeli bulldozers tore down the offices of the Ministry of the Interior, as well as offices used by the Palestinian security services. Israeli occupying forces also stormed the office of the Palestine News Agency (WAFA) in the West Bank city of Ramallah, as well as the headquarters of the local Ramallah governorate, ransacking the property and arresting five civilians, including two police guards, taking them to an unknown location. Such destruction demonstrates yet again the intention of the Israeli occupying forces to destroy Palestinian National Authority institutions and vital infrastructure.

Today, Israeli occupying forces bombed a house in the Al-Shuja'ieh neighbourhood, east of Gaza City, killing four Palestinian civilians of the same Harara family.

The international community must condemn such unlawful acts and compel the occupying Power to cease such grave breaches and abide by its obligations under international law, including the Fourth Geneva Convention. Moreover, the protection of civilians must be a priority for the international community. They cannot be left at the mercy of their occupier when there are clear provisions in international law intended to provide them with protection and security.

Furthermore, it is imperative that measures ultimately be taken to hold the perpetrators of those crimes accountable and to bring them to justice, for without such measures the culture of impunity that we are now witnessing will only continue, with even more disastrous consequences. It is unacceptable to say "sorry" for killing civilians. Those who continue to repeat such heinous acts should be brought to justice very soon.

In addition to the death and injury inflicted on the Palestinian civilian population, the occupying Power has persisted with its wanton destruction of Palestinian property and vital infrastructure. Those unlawful acts are part and parcel of the occupying Power's cruel measures of collective punishment against the Palestinian people. Over the past three weeks, the devastation wrought on Palestinian infrastructure by the occupying forces has been immense.

Along with the bombing of power stations, water pipelines, bridges and roads, Israeli war planes have fired missiles at Palestinian National Authority institutions, causing extensive damage to many and completely destroying others, including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Gaza City. Israeli tanks and bulldozers have also continued to raze crops and destroy Palestinian agricultural land. All of that destruction, in addition to the closure of border crossings into and out of the area, continues to have a severe impact upon the already deplorable humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip, where the Palestinian civilian population is suffering from serious shortages of food, medicine and clean water supplies. Israel must be held accountable for the destruction it has deliberately caused, and must rebuild everything it has destroyed, much of which had been funded by the international donor community itself over the years.

There is no doubt that the recent failure of the Security Council to respond appropriately to the Israeli onslaught against the Palestinian civilian population, due to the veto cast by one of the Council's permanent members, has allowed the Israeli Government to continue carrying out such illegal actions with sheer impunity. Without concern for reproach and punishment or for the consequences of its actions, Israel continues to behave as a State that is above the law and continues to refuse to implement dozens of Security Council resolutions related to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Unwilling to uphold its duties for the maintenance of international peace and security when it comes to the situation in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, the Security Council has allowed Israel to continue to act beyond the parameters of international law, permitting it to use the most oppressive measures and practices to impose more death, destruction and loss on the Palestinian people under its occupation.

I need not today remind the members of the Council of the fact that all of the atrocities being committed by Israel, the occupying Power, have been committed against an unarmed and defenceless civilian population, who, according to the provisions of international humanitarian law governing military occupation, should be considered protected persons. The occupying Power is obligated to ensure the safety and well-being of these persons. Failing that, those persons are entitled to and should be accorded

international protection. Yet, time and again, the Security Council has been unable to take the necessary measures to ensure the protection of the Palestinian civilian population in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, leaving it at the mercy of the brute force and illegal policies and practices of the occupying Power.

In this regard, we reiterate that it remains the duty of the Security Council, in accordance with its authority and responsibilities under the United Nations Charter, to act immediately in order to address the continuing crisis in the occupied Palestinian territory and bring a halt to this perilous deterioration of the situation. The Council cannot continue to remain passive in the face of such a military aggression against a defenceless civilian population and the grave breaches of international humanitarian law that are being committed by Israel, the occupying Power.

In this connection, we continue to reiterate our position that the Council must begin by condemning this most recent Israeli aggression and calling for the immediate cessation of hostilities and compliance with the rules and provisions of international law, including the Fourth Geneva Convention, and calling also for the immediate withdrawal of the Israeli occupying forces to their original positions before the aggression against the Gaza Strip began. Moreover, the Security Council must call on Israel to immediately release all democratically elected Palestinian officials detained since 28 June 2006.

If the Council does not act, we will not soon see an end to the vicious circle of violence that we are now witnessing. Rather, this dangerous conflict will only be prolonged and compounded. It is therefore our strong hope that the Council will uphold its duties and take the necessary action to address this growing crisis in order to allow for peace to be realized, not only for Israelis and Palestinians, but for the region as a whole, which is clearly standing at a crucial juncture — on the precipice of a plunge into an all-out military conflagration.

In this connection, we would like to extend our appreciation to the Secretary-General for dispatching an urgent mission to the region and for the report he submitted to the Council at yesterday's meeting. The Palestinian leadership will continue to work with the Secretary-General on the issues he raised in the report related to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Before concluding, I would like to express our deepest concern and to extend our condolences to our sisters and brothers in Lebanon, who are suffering immensely from the Israeli aggression, which has resulted in the death of hundreds of Lebanese civilians and has caused the widespread destruction of Lebanon's vital infrastructure and institutions. We express our solidarity with the Lebanese people and call for a comprehensive end of hostilities and an end to the deliberate targeting of the lives of the Lebanese people, their property and infrastructure. The Security Council must take action to bring an immediate halt to Israel's military aggression against Lebanon, establish a comprehensive ceasefire and lift the Israeli blockade imposed on Lebanon. Diplomacy is the only way to resolve this escalating crisis.

The President (*spoke in French*): The next speaker on my list is the representative of Israel, to whom I give the floor.

Mr. Gillerman (Israel): Mr. President, I wish to thank you for your continued able stewardship of this Council during these difficult days. I would like to welcome the Secretary-General and thank him for gracing this meeting with his important presence. I would also like to thank Mr. Jan Egeland for his very precise and important report, and Mr. Vijay Nambiar for his report on the very important mission which was dispatched by the Secretary-General to our region. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank his colleagues, Mr. Terje Roed-Larsen and Mr. Alvaro de Soto, for the important work they did.

We just heard the Palestinian Observer describe a situation which seems very surrealistic. There was a whole array of description of what Israel does as if it all came out of nowhere, as if it all emanated out of the clear blue sky. No mention of the kidnapping of the Israeli soldier, Corporal Gilad Shalit; no mention of the firing of hundreds of Qassam rockets by the deadly Hamas-led Government of his people; no mention of the fact that Israel totally withdrew from Gaza nearly a year ago. There is a certain absurdity to the constant use of words "occupying Power" when referring to an area which has not been occupied for a year, which has been totally free to run its own affairs and to prove that it is indeed capable of running its own affairs, take care of its people, their standard of living and their quality of life, and which instead brutally and cynically chose terror.

The same was apparent also in the Palestinian Observer's reference to his sisters and brothers in Lebanon and the Israeli aggression which, again, came out of nowhere. No kidnapping of two Israeli soldiers, no shelling of Israeli cities by hundreds of missiles and rockets.

I think that the Council deserves more.

We met here just one week ago. What a difference a week makes. Think of what we all have learned in one week. The world has learned of the enormous arsenal of missiles that Hizbollah has been amassing in Lebanon. The world has learned how deeply Hizbollah has penetrated Lebanese society. The world has learned again how ruthless and indiscriminate Hizbollah is. The international community and the Council have learned how right they were in repeatedly demanding the disarming of this terrorist monster.

We have been aware for years of this deadly, cancerous growth which has insidiously invaded this beautiful, potentially prosperous country, and we have repeatedly warned about the danger. The Council took the threat seriously, as witnessed by its resolution 1559 (2004). And now, sadly, the peoples of Israel and of Lebanon are reaping the miseries of war, sown long ago but nurtured by those who chose to turn a blind eye to what was so clearly happening.

Terrorism has occupied, ravaged, raped and pillaged Lebanon. Terror is the true occupying power of Lebanon. For years, Hizbollah has been amassing thousands of rockets, aimed at Israel, preparing for this attack. Its forces may be concentrated in the south, but its tangled web holds the entire nation of Lebanon hostage to its violent agenda. The Government of Lebanon, for its own political reasons, has chosen conflict with Israel instead of battling the cancer that occupies the body and soul of its very country. That cancer must be excised. It cannot be partially removed or allowed to fester. It must be removed without any trace, or, as cancers do and will, it will return and spread, striking and killing again.

Since last week, when the State of Israel was suddenly attacked without any provocation, citizens all across northern Israel have been suffering the consequences of Lebanon's failure. Rockets terrorize, maim and kill people in cities such as Haifa, Nahariya, Tiberias and Safed. Towns across the Galilee have been hit by a ceaseless barrage of missiles. And only two days ago, two young children playing in St. Paul's Street in the holy city of Nazareth — the home town of Jesus — were mercilessly struck down by a Hizbollah rocket.

As we speak, another wave of dozens of rockets is raining down on cities and towns across northern Israel. At the first siren, thousands run for the safety of bomb shelters and reinforced safe-rooms, which, by law, must be in all homes. The rockets they flee are sent from across a border, from other homes, where other families reside. Their special rooms, however, have been modified to serve as rocket launching pads. This is the horrible equation that we face.

We have witnessed civilian casualties, and we grieve for each one of them. Also, we have heard how difficult it is to distinguish between Hizbollah and civilians. We have heard this from none other than the Lebanese Ambassador, who said on American television just this week:

> "It is impossible to differentiate between Hizbollah and civilians in Lebanon. Hizbollah is everywhere in Lebanon, and has become part of Lebanese society."

This is also how cancer works, attacking healthy cells, invading and spreading through the whole body until healthy and malignant become inseparable. And this is exactly the point that Israel has been making for years. Terrorism has been sending its long tentacles through every level of Lebanese society, integrating itself into the very fibre of a nation. Terrorists live and operate among civilians, occupying their towns and villages, using them as human shields, and they have infiltrated the Government itself.

We are told of a so-called political branch of Hizbollah. Do not be misled by this ruse — an attempt to paint a kinder face on cold-blooded terrorists who are intent on cold-blooded murder. The Hizbollah member of parliament and the terrorist in the hills launching rockets at Israeli civilians both have the same strategy and goal. These labels cannot be allowed to give legitimacy to a gang of thugs.

In spite of the very difficult situation on the ground, Israel is acutely aware of the humanitarian situation. I wish to inform the Council that I have just received official confirmation from Israel that in addition to the corridor allowing evacuation from Lebanon, a two-way, in-and-out humanitarian corridor

to meet the needs of those affected on the Lebanese side has been established. As the Israeli side of this mechanism is now being formulated, I would like to assure the Council of the continued cooperation of the Government of Israel on this important issue.

We have been hearing calls for a cessation of hostilities, but before we can contemplate a cessation of hostilities, we must insist on the cessation of terror. A temporary, artificial ceasefire — or whatever term one may use — will only result in an illusionary lull, which would allow this disease to spread and kill again. The international community must finally address the terrorism that occupies Lebanon. The current crisis is not only a danger to Israel and Lebanon, but to the entire region. We should have no illusions: the terrorism at the root of this crisis is a danger everywhere. We know where it starts, but we do not know where it will take its violence. Too many nations have been taught this harsh lesson.

The international community must also vigorously address the sponsors of terrorism: Syria and Iran, the members of that exclusive club, that axis of terror. Those Governments support, harbour, train and finance the terrorists and their murderous acts. As we speak, they continue to aggressively undermine all efforts toward a lasting peace in the region, supplying deadly arms to Hizbollah in the north and Hamas in Gaza.

No words can better describe the true feelings of the Lebanese people than those of Lebanese leaders themselves. As I did last week, I would like to share with you a few more of their thoughts.

Walid Jumblat, the Lebanese Druze leader, said:

> "The abduction of the two Israeli soldiers was secretly planned in Damascus two days before the meeting of the G-8 meeting in order to divert attention from Iran. The Iranian envoy, Larijani, himself transmitted the code to implement the abduction plan in order to set off an international turmoil, which would divert the world's attention from the Iranian nuclear crisis."

And Saad Hariri, the son of the slain Prime Minister of Lebanon, whose murder is now being internationally investigated, said of Syria's role:

> "The Syrian president's security apparatus in Damascus has incited Nasrallah in order to set Lebanon on fire... Lebanon became the battleground of other countries — countries that call us brothers but who have no interest whatsoever in our fate."

Israel welcomes the declaration of the G-8 leaders, whose statement of 16 July provides a basis for progress towards a sustainable peace, in accordance with the relevant Security Council resolutions. As a first step towards this goal, Israel demands the immediately release of its kidnapped boys, Ehud Goldwasser and Eldad Regev, as well as Gilad Shalit, who is still held by Hamas.

Israel, as it has done in this Chamber before, demands the full disarming of Hizbollah and insists that Lebanon employ its sovereignty over all its territory, in full compliance with resolution 1559 (2004). This very Council has demanded this, and now, finally, it must be fully implemented. It must be implemented for the safety of Israel, for the stability of the region and the well-being of the world. And today more than ever it must be implemented to assure Lebanon's future. Lebanon had a glorious past and a potential for a bright future before it mortgaged it to terrorists and tyrants. It must today remember this past in order to regain its future, for, as Winston Churchill said, "A nation that forgets its past has no future."

Once terror has been excised from our midst, Israel stands ready to embark with the people of Lebanon on a process of rebuilding, renewal, development and cooperation, so that projects will replace rockets, goods will replace arms, factories will replace bunkers and playgrounds will replace battlegrounds; so that Israeli and Lebanese children will play with seashells rather than be hit by shells from rockets; so we can rekindle the glory of our past and secure the future of the generations to come.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Lebanon.

Mr. Mahmoud (Lebanon) (*spoke in Arabic*): The Security Council has convened its regular meeting to address the question of the Middle East at a time when the region is experiencing extremely dangerous and tragic circumstances in Lebanon and Palestine. The latest outbreak of violence is yet another episode in the ongoing turmoil that has plagued the region over the past six decades. This dire situation reveals the urgent and vital need for a just, lasting and comprehensive settlement of a tragic situation that is as old as the United Nations itself. This ongoing dangerous situation

is the result of a chronic failure to respect international law and to abide by repeated resolutions adopted by the Security Council, the General Assembly and other United Nations bodies over the years.

Every effort to resolve this question outside the United Nations through parallel channels has failed to put an end to the continuous suffering of the peoples of the region and the enormous losses at all levels. The failure to achieve a just peace based on respect for legitimate rights will cause further destruction, despair and extremism.

Once again, Israel is betting on its excessive military force to settle its problems with its neighbours. Lebanon is once again the victim of acts of aggression whose brutality has exceeded all expectations and gone beyond all previous similar acts. It is as if the Israeli leaders are scheming to top the atrocities they perpetrated in Lebanon in their repeated invasions of 1978, 1982, 1993 and 1996, hiding, as always, behind the right to self-defence. That reveals their twisted understanding of international law.

Since the beginning of its military operations 10 days ago, Israel has destroyed Lebanon's infrastructure and targeted its civilians, destroying their livelihoods and disrupting their movements. The death toll has risen well over 350, with more than 1,000 injured and half a million displaced and without shelter. Tens of thousands of foreigners have fled the country — foreigners that Lebanon had succeeded in attracting over the past 15 years after it was able to rebuild itself and rise from the wreckage to play a constructive role in the region and the world.

The Israeli aggression has daily targeted the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) and put it under siege, preventing it from fulfilling its mandate, carrying out its functions, and from communicating with its units or providing them with necessary supplies.

Prime Minister Fouad Siniora has addressed several touching appeals to the international community requesting immediate intervention to end the tragic suffering of the people of Lebanon caused by the heavy Israeli bombardment by air, land and sea of various parts of the country and by the tight maritime blockade of its ports. That blockade threatens real catastrophe by preventing the delivery of food, medicine and fuel.

We all heard the Secretary-General's statement to the Council yesterday. We appreciate his initiative to send a senior-level team to the region in order to work towards a solution to the conflict. We welcome the positive elements contained in his statement. It painted an objective picture of the devastating impact that the Israeli military operations are having in Lebanon and the scope of the ordeal suffered by the Lebanese people. The situation calls for an immediate and comprehensive ceasefire and a solution to the current conflict by peaceful and diplomatic means.

We appreciate the Secretary-General's appeal to the international community to support the Lebanese Government and his reaffirmation that the United Nations will stand by Lebanon to help it to emerge from the conflict. We also appreciate his position that the United Nations will provide Lebanon with all that it needs in the future to rebuild what was destroyed.

The Lebanese Government reiterates once more its call for, first, an immediate and comprehensive ceasefire under United Nations auspices so as to enable the Organization, the sisterly Arab countries and other friendly international parties, in cooperation with the Lebanese Government, to responsibly and fully resolve all issues arising from the events of the past few days, as well as their underlying causes.

Secondly, we call for the preservation and safety of Lebanon and its citizens through the extension of its authority throughout its territory, including all occupied Lebanese territories in the area of the Sheba'a farms and the exercise by the State of full responsibility and sovereignty over it, the release of Lebanese detainees in Israeli prisons and the adherence to the 1949 armistice agreement, unanimously agreed upon by Lebanon in the Taif national accord.

Thirdly, Lebanon calls upon its brothers and friends throughout the world to come to its rescue by exerting pressure to stop the aggression and end the blockade and by providing all forms of humanitarian aid and assistance.

Fourthly, the Lebanese Government holds Israel responsible for the humanitarian, economic and reconstruction catastrophe that has befallen Lebanon. Lebanon has made an enormous effort to recover from the consequences of the repeated Israeli invasions and prolonged occupation. It will spare no effort to force Israel to compensate the Lebanese people for the

damage and devastation that it has inflicted upon their infrastructure and institutions by its barbaric onslaught.

Fifthly, the Lebanese Government has declared Lebanon a disaster zone requiring an immediate Arab, international and comprehensive action plan to rebuild what was has been destroyed as a result of the murderous aggression.

What Lebanon is currently going through is an example of the continuous suffering of the peoples of the region, who, generation after generation, have been denied their natural right to a life of dignity as a result of the rejection of the principles of law and justice — the very principles for whose sake humanity endured so much so as to develop, document, codify and adopt them in the framework of international relations.

Earlier, we heard the representative of Israel inform us that Israel has agreed to a safe corridor for humanitarian assistance for the victims of his country's aggression, as if we are supposed to pay tribute to him for his compassion. But the entire world has witnessed how the Israeli military machine has left Lebanon in ruins, how the Lebanese army was targeted in its barracks near Beirut and how medical and humanitarian assistance convoys were attacked. We hope that the children of Lebanon will feel the compassion and mercy that the representative of Israel has expressed here.

More than a year ago, the world watched as tens of thousands of young Lebanese took to the streets and filled the squares of Beirut, calling for the unity and freedom of their country and for hope for a future as bright as the sun that shines there. But what do they find today except destruction, frustration, displacement and death? What kind of future will emerge from those ashes and ruins except fear, despair, poverty and extremism? Enough disregard for the lives and the rights of people. Enough destruction and demolition of what decent people have built. Enough killing, enough humiliation, enough displacement of innocent people. Enough wars that leave future generations with nothing but hatred and belligerence on both sides.

We appeal to the international community and to you Excellencies meeting in this Chamber, who have the primary responsibility for protecting the achievements of the Lebanese people by supporting the Government, as was stressed by the Secretary-General in this very Chamber yesterday, to face the aggression and to continue along the path of promoting democracy. Who else but you is in a position to maintain stability in our region by achieving a just and comprehensive peace?

Lebanon will remain a country and a land of interaction, a crossroads and a message for humanity. As such, we are a nation that Israel has been unable to emulate — and it will never be able to do so.

The President (*spoke in French*): I shall now give the floor to the representative of Qatar.

Mr. Al-Nasser (Qatar) (*spoke in Arabic*): Allow me at the outset to express our profound gratitude and appreciation for the great efforts of His Excellency Mr. Kofi Annan, Secretary-General, in seeking the best means to defuse the crisis afflicting Lebanon. Our thanks go to all members of the mission dispatched by the Secretary-General to the region, headed by Ambassador Vijay Nambiar, and for the briefings they gave us. We would also like to commend Mr. Jan Egeland, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, for his briefing regarding the humanitarian needs in that region.

Everyone is fully aware of the grave situation in the Middle East; it has suddenly deteriorated as a result of the excessive use of military force by Israel against Lebanon on the pretext of self-defence. However, the greatest majority of the targets of the Israeli military aggression have been civilian targets, including the international airport, residential buildings, factories, power plants, bridges, highways and even grain silos and houses of worship. This leaves no doubt that the aim of this war goes beyond its stated objective.

In one week, the Israeli campaign has claimed the lives of hundreds of people, injured more than 1,000 civilians, displaced half a million citizens, caused major suffering for the Lebanese people and devastated its emerging economy, which required long years of rebuilding after the war. The current situation also poses a grave threat to Lebanon's nascent democracy and to the Lebanese Government. This is an unwarranted and uneven war.

Indeed, it is saddening to us that this Council, which is tasked with the maintenance of international peace and security, stands idly by, unable and powerless to put an end to the bloodbath engulfing our Lebanese brothers, although the Israeli aggression against Lebanon is a blatant and clear violation of

resolution 1559 (2004), which affirmed the unity, territorial integrity and sovereignty of Lebanon.

It is a delusion to think that the destruction of Lebanon will provide security for Israel or that it will strengthen and enhance the role of the Lebanese Government of Mr. Fouad Siniora. On the contrary, what is happening will only deepen the hatred and rancour among the people for generations to come and will prompt many of those who call for peaceful coexistence between the Arabs and Israel to take opposite positions, in addition to effectively weakening the Lebanese Government.

Is this what we really want? Does the shelling of Lebanese national institutions strengthen the authority of the Government and ensure the allegiance of its army, or does it weaken it? Does the targeting of the Lebanese army — which has become a victim of Israeli bombs, both those prohibited by international law and those that are not — strengthen the prospects of its control over south Lebanon? Israel's unleashing of its military machine against that country is tantamount to State terrorism.

Three days ago, the Office of the Coordinator of Humanitarian Affairs held a briefing to determine the requirements for facing the deteriorating situation in Lebanon. What kind of equipment was requested? The result of the assessment was a request for equipment used in such natural disasters as earthquakes, since the bombing has spared nothing, neither human life nor property.

It is deplorable that the lives of innocent people have become mere statistics. Has our Council not listened to Prime Minister Siniora, who said, "I appeal to your humanitarian conscience not to abandon Lebanon?" Has our strong, united Council — which has dealt consistently, firmly and forcefully with the real questions that threaten international peace and security — not heard the sound of explosions in Beirut? Have we not seen the bodies of children and old men being lifted out of the ruins? Have we not heard about the bombing of ambulances?

History will never be compassionate. Where is our conscience? What has become of our call for respecting human rights, foremost among them the right to life? The Council bears a major responsibility under the Charter, and defusing the crisis makes it imperative that we create the necessary conditions, because conditions do not create themselves. How long will the doors of our Council remain closed while the children of Lebanon knock on them and all peace-loving peoples call upon it to act?

Stop the bloodbath! The terrible humanitarian conditions experienced by civilians, the deteriorating situation of women, children and the elderly, the sick and the handicapped, make it incumbent upon our Council to come to their aid decisively. Justice makes it incumbent on us to hold Israel responsible and to call on it to compensate for all the destruction that has been afflicted upon Lebanon and its people.

The situation in Gaza is not very different from that which we described in Lebanon. There, too, we find that military aggression does not spare civilians. Again we find the infrastructure being targeted. However, the humanitarian situation in Gaza was very bad before and has become worse since the hostile actions initiated by the Israeli army in the Strip during the past weeks. It is a fact that Israel, the occupying Power, refuses to respond to the calls of the international community to refrain from pursuing its military aggression.

There is no point now in assigning blame to any party. Instead, we would like to diagnose the problem and its root causes, so that we can deal with it before it is too late, before the war escalates beyond the situation that we have today.

The attempt to deal with the question by implicating other States, with whose policies we may agree or not, is a call for pouring more fuel on the flames. It is easy to open the gates of hell, but what guarantees our ability to close them and to prevent their fire from scorching everyone? The road to hell is paved with good intentions.

Throughout the past week, the Secretary-General has made efforts to mitigate the crisis in that region. He has established personal contacts and dispatched a diplomatic team to the region. These are laudable efforts. He also submitted a number of proposals to the Council yesterday with the aim of finding a solution to the crisis. It is our view that some of the Secretary-General's ideas are positive and have purpose and could help in defusing the festering crisis. Yet, we need to coordinate closely with the Government of Lebanon in any resolution regarding the nature and structure of a United Nations presence in that country with respect to that country's sovereignty and internal affairs.

The State of Qatar, as a member of the Security Council, has appealed to the Council from the beginning to act promptly to put an immediate end to the bloodshed in Lebanon and to contain the crisis before it becomes a veritable bloodbath. However, the continued silence of the Council will only allow the bloodshed to go on, thereby victimizing even more innocent people.

Mr. Bolton (United States of America): Mr. President, I wish to thank you for having convened this important meeting. This month's meeting takes on far greater salience in the light of the rapidly unfolding events in the Middle East.

The United States remains unequivocal in its commitment to working with others to build a foundation for lasting peace in the region. But it would be a disservice, and only bring increased hardship to the peoples of Israel and of Lebanon, if the Security Council adopted stopgap measures which did nothing to address the violence.

Let us be clear: if we are to identify lasting solutions to bring about a permanent peace in the Middle East, we must have a shared understanding of the root causes of the problem. Let there be no misunderstanding. All of us in this Chamber face a common and shared enemy, an enemy that is solely and directly responsible for the situation we find ourselves in today. That enemy is terrorism — not only organizations like Hizbollah and Hamas, which kidnap Israeli citizens or fire rockets into Israeli territory, but their sponsors in Tehran and Damascus.

As we speak, Hizbollah continues to operate in southern Lebanon with impunity, defying the will of the Security Council as established in resolution 1559 (2004). We take special note of the important statement of the Arab League, which had the courage and conviction to condemn Hizbollah for its role in instigating this latest round of violence. The United States reiterates its call for the full implementation of resolution 1559 (2004) and the full extension of the authority of the Government of Lebanon over all of Lebanese territory. If that were done, then Israel would not be subject to terrorist attacks, nor would the people of Lebanon be subject to the reign of terror that Hizbollah inflicts.

The United States is studying several of the ideas proposed on how best to secure the implementation of resolution 1559 (2004), which Secretary Rice will discuss shortly, including the insertion of an international stabilization force. In considering these proposals, we must always keep at the forefront that the key goal should be to disarm and "defang" Hizbollah, to quote Secretary Rice. We take note of the fact that some Member States have called for an immediate and unconditional ceasefire between Israel and Hizbollah, but we must ask our colleagues: How do you negotiate and maintain a ceasefire with a terrorist organization, one which does not even recognize the right of Israel to exist?

The United States has no confidence that an unconditional ceasefire by itself would be honoured by Hizbollah. It would only allow it time to regroup and plan its next wave of kidnappings and attacks against Israel. The United States seeks an end to the violence that afflicts innocent civilians, and it is for that very reason that we are working for the long-term, sustained conditions that will make a real ceasefire possible and permanent. Our aim is to address the underlying causes of the violence in southern Lebanon. That is the purpose of Secretary Rice's upcoming trip to the region.

In considering a stabilization force, we should consider three broad questions. The first deals with whether or not it would be empowered to deal with the real problem, namely Hizbollah. How would such a force deal with Hizbollah armed components, and would it be empowered to deal with arms shipments from countries such as Syria and Iran that support Hezbollah? What exactly would be the extent of the mandate to deal with the military threat posed by Hizbollah?

The second set of questions concerns how any new force would relate to the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), which has been there already for 28 years. While that is hardly an interim force, it is reasonable and responsible to ask how a new force would differ from and be more effective than UNIFIL, and whether that force could be multilateral, but not necessarily a United Nations force.

Thirdly, we need to keep in mind the fact that a key prerequisite for the complete implementation of resolution 1559 (2004) requires the extension of full sovereignty by the Lebanese Government over its own territory. Would the addition of a new multilateral force help strengthen Lebanese institutions or just create new multilateral institutions? Would such a force contribute

to the institutional strength of the Lebanese armed forces? Would it help to fully implement resolution 1559 (2004)?

As I noted earlier, we cannot defang Hizbollah and Hamas while ignoring those who back them with weapons, financing and political support. The nexus of terror between Hizbollah and Hamas and their principal backers, Iran and Syria, can no longer be ignored. The United States calls upon Tehran and Damascus to stop acting through their terrorist proxies in the region and to work towards a lasting peace with Israel. Again, for the fourth time in 22 days, we call upon Syria to arrest Khaled Mashal, the leader of Hamas, who has received safe harbour in Damascus.

There is no moral equivalence between acts of terrorism and Israel's exercise of its legitimate right to self-defence. Of course, it is a matter of great concern to us, as President Bush has stressed, that civilian deaths are occurring. It is a tragedy, and I would not attempt to describe it any other way. We have urged the Government of Israel to exercise the greatest possible care in its use of force. But it is a mistake to ascribe a moral equivalence to the killing of civilians who die as the direct result of malicious terrorist acts, the very purpose of which are to kill civilians, and the tragic and unfortunate consequence of civilian deaths as a result of military action taken in self-defence.

The United States remains firmly committed to working through the Security Council — indeed, through all diplomatic channels — to find a lasting end to the violence which has plagued the region for too long. We hope that from this current crisis we can seize the opportunity to once and forever dismantle Hizbollah, restore democratic control by Lebanon over all of its territory, and lay the foundations that would allow Israel to live in peace with its neighbours.

Mr. Oshima (Japan): Japan appreciated the Secretary-General's briefing yesterday in the Security Council, as well as his proposals and ideas to address the developing crisis in the Middle East region. Japan supports the Secretary-General's ongoing good-offices initiatives aimed at defusing the crisis. The proposals laid out yesterday are being carefully considered by my Government.

I thank Mr. Nambiar for the additional briefing today and express our appreciation for the efforts he and his team members have made to defuse the escalating crisis. I also thank the Emergency Relief Coordinator, Mr. Jan Egeland, for his briefing and take this opportunity to commend the humanitarian agencies — the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and the other agencies, funds and programmes — for all the efforts they are deploying to address emergency humanitarian needs in the region.

In the past months, we have witnessed widespread and deeply troubling changes in the Middle East situation and the continued deterioration of conditions almost day by day: the attacks by Hizbollah across the Blue Line, the abduction of two Israeli soldiers, the ensuing Israeli military operations against Hizbollah, bases and civilian infrastructure in Lebanon, and a further escalation of hostilities. These developments have dramatically changed the political and security situation in the region, with many already killed or wounded on both sides, causing extreme concern to the international community and the Security Council.

We agree that obstacles need to be overcome as soon as possible to reach a ceasefire and reduce the level of violence quickly. The international community, through the Security Council, must make its position clear on the need for an immediate cessation of hostilities by Israel and other parties in order to protect civilians and the civilian infrastructure.

We are also very concerned at the very heavy toll on innocent civilian lives in Palestine, Israel and Lebanon and at the extreme deterioration in the humanitarian situation of Palestinians in Gaza and people in Lebanon, as well as the damage caused by the missile rocket attacks by Hizbollah against Israel.

We therefore fully support the acceleration of humanitarian assistance to the people affected and of reconstruction and development assistance, including restoration of the civilian infrastructure destroyed in the crisis. In that regard, the idea of establishing safe corridors for humanitarian access, as explained in detail by Mr. Egeland, deserves support. We expect and welcome the fullest cooperation by the Lebanese and Israeli Governments in that regard. We also expect the Lebanese Government to take the lead in the reconstruction process, by exercising its ownership of the process, with the support of the international donor community.

During his trip to the region last week, which included visits to Israel, Palestine and Jordan, our Prime Minister Koizumi expressed his support for

President Abbas and announced additional humanitarian and other assistance to the Palestinians, bringing Japan's aid to the Palestinians since May 2005 to a total of $103.1 million. Furthermore, he proposed a concept called the "corridor for peace and prosperity", which aims at promoting regional cooperation in the mid- to long-term to achieve coexistence and mutual prosperity. All of the leaders expressed their support.

In the more immediate term, the Summit of the Group of Eight meeting in St. Petersburg last weekend issued a statement on the Middle East with recommendations on how the current crisis should be addressed. Japan fully associates itself with that statement. It calls on Israel to exercise the utmost restraint and seek to avoid casualties among innocent civilians and damage to civilian infrastructure, and to refrain from acts that would further destabilize the Lebanese Government. It affirms that extremist elements and those who support them cannot be allowed to plunge the Middle East into chaos and to provoke a wider conflict, and also warns that they must immediately halt their attacks.

In light of that, it is urgently necessary to create conditions for a cessation of hostilities that will be sustainable. That will require the return of the Israeli soldiers in Gaza and Lebanon unharmed, an end to the shelling of Israeli territory by Hizbollah, an end to Israeli military operations and the early withdrawal of Israeli forces from Gaza, and the release of the arrested Palestinian Ministers and parliamentarians.

Prime Minister Koizumi, for his part, conveyed his firm belief to the leaders he met last week in the region that there is no alternative but to work towards coexistence and mutual prosperity. He called for Israel to exercise maximum restraint and for President Abbas to provide the necessary leadership.

Concerning the situation in Lebanon, we will need to ensure the cooperation and efforts of all countries concerned, including neighbouring countries such as Iran and Syria, for full implementation of the relevant Security Council resolutions, including resolutions 1559 (2004) and 1680 (2006). It is essential that the disarming and disbanding of Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias and the extension of control by the Government of Lebanon over all of its territory be implemented in a manner that will not destabilize the region. We commend and support the efforts of the Lebanese Government for full sovereignty and expansion of political independence.

With regard to the possibility of an international security and monitoring presence, Japan would like to emphasize that any kind of presence should be designed to contribute to implementing resolution 1559 (2004) and to bringing about stability in the region and should have the consent of all the relevant parties. The details on issues such as the possible size of the presence, its mandate and demarcation of responsibility with the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon need to be studied carefully.

In light of the deterioration of the situation in the Middle East and its serious implications for international peace and security, the Council should act swiftly and in unity, in order not only to express its concerns, but also to create conditions for a cessation of violence that would be sustainable and to address the immediate humanitarian requirements in Lebanon and Palestine. To that end, Japan will continue to participate actively in the discussions in the Council, while continuing to pursue its own diplomatic efforts in cooperation with all the concerned countries in the region, in order to defuse the crisis and restore calm and stability to the region.

Mr. Burian (Slovakia): Slovakia fully aligns itself with the statement that will be delivered shortly by the Permanent Representative of Finland on behalf of the European Union. Therefore, I will limit my statement to the following remarks.

Slovakia expresses its deep concern about the deteriorating situation in the Middle East and the escalation of hostilities between Israel and Hizbollah. We urge all parties to cease the hostilities and violence and to return to political and diplomatic means for resolving the current crisis. We fear that the escalation of the current crisis and violence might have dire consequences not only for the countries involved, but also for regional and global security. In this regard, we would like to reiterate our firm belief that there is no military solution to the Middle East conflict. The only way to achieve a comprehensive and lasting settlement is through peaceful negotiations and full implementation of all relevant Security Council resolutions and the principles defined by the Quartet in the road map.

We have repeatedly condemned terrorist actions and provocations by Hamas and Hizbollah that have

led to the current crisis. We call on all States to exercise their influence on Hizbullah and Hamas to secure the release of the kidnapped Israeli soldiers and to stop their terrorist actions, including firing missiles against Israel.

While we recognize Israel's right to self-defence against terrorism and its perpetrators, we urge Israel to exercise that right with utmost caution and restraint. We call on Israel not to resort to the disproportionate use of force and to do everything possible to avoid the loss of innocent lives, destruction of civilian infrastructure and increased suffering of the civilian population. We are particularly concerned about the deteriorating humanitarian situation in Lebanon and the increasing exodus of Lebanese people caused by military actions.

We commend the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) for its quick action. We call on OCHA and other United Nations agencies to intensify their efforts in response to the deepening humanitarian crisis, in order to help alleviate the human suffering of an increasing number of internally displaced persons and refugees. We call on all parties to secure unobstructed access for humanitarian assistance. In that respect, we would like to reiterate that protection of civilians in a time of conflict is an obligation under international humanitarian law.

We commend the initiative of the Secretary-General to provide his good offices to defuse the current crisis and stop the bloodshed. We welcome his proposals for a solution, as presented yesterday. We believe they should be seriously considered by the Security Council and reflected in a future resolution aimed at reaching a lasting and sustainable settlement. At the same time, diplomatic efforts to resolve the current crisis should be broadened and intensified to prevent further destabilization of the Lebanese Government and of the whole region. We welcome and fully support the statement of the G-8 leaders at the St. Petersburg Summit concerning the situation in the Middle East and their commitment to pursue efforts to restore peace.

We believe that it is important that the Security Council respond quickly and in a concrete way to the call of the G-8 leaders to develop a plan for the full implementation of resolutions 1559 (2004) and 1680 (2006). That was also one of the elements necessary for a solution suggested by the Secretary-General yesterday.

The international community must help the Government of Lebanon to establish full sovereignty, assume full control over the whole of the country's territory and disarm all militias — which, in our opinion, is key to achieving a lasting and sustainable solution and is an important precondition for the stabilization and continuation of the democratic processes in the country. The idea of a stabilization force as a part of that plan deserves, in our view, further consideration and elaboration.

In conclusion, I would like to underline that the restoration of calm in Lebanon is an important step also for the restoration of the peace process in the Middle East region as a whole. In that regard, we are concerned about the deteriorating situation between Israel and the Palestinians and about the increasing number of civilian casualties on both sides as a result of hostilities and terrorist actions.

We think that the Palestinian Government, led by Hamas, missed an important opportunity to advance the peace process by their continued refusal to accept three principles defined by the Quartet. In our view, that is a basic precondition for becoming a partner in the peace talks. In order to create favourable conditions for a return to dialogue between Israel and the Palestinians, we hope that President Abbas will succeed in his efforts to create appropriate support among the Palestinian people for the objectives set out in the road map. We think that the international community should also extend its full support to him in that endeavour by addressing urgent humanitarian needs of the Palestinian population through the temporary international mechanism administered by the European Union. In that context, we urge Israel to resume transfers of withheld Palestinian tax and customs revenues.

Finally, we would like to take this opportunity to reaffirm our full support for a just, comprehensive and lasting settlement to the Middle East conflict based on all the relevant Security Council resolutions and on negotiations leading to implementing the vision of two democratic States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security.

Mr. Liu Zhenmin (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): The Chinese delegation would like to thank Mr. Nambiar, Special Adviser of the Secretary-General, and

Under-Secretary-General Egeland for their briefings this morning.

In recent weeks the Security Council has been seized of the worsening situation in the Middle East. The Council convened an emergency public meeting at the end of last month to consider the situation between Israel and Palestine. A week ago, in this very Chamber, we discussed the conflict between Israel and Lebanon. We are gathered here once again today. However, the crisis in the Middle East continues to show no sign of easing. The Gaza Strip in Palestine and the south of Lebanon and Lebanon's capital, Beirut, are engulfed in the flames and smoke of war, while some cities in Israel are still under rocket attack. Once-quiet cities are now in ruins. The scenes of devastation and of the misery and suffering of victims are deeply harrowing and disturbing.

China has made its position clear since the beginning of the crisis in the Middle East.

First, China is opposed to any action that may destabilize the Middle East. We condemn the attacks targeting civilians and civilian infrastructure. We call upon all parties to the conflict immediately to cease all hostilities.

Secondly, China urges all the parties concerned to exercise maximum restraint in order to avoid harming civilians and to prevent the situation from deteriorating further.

Thirdly, all the parties concerned should provide access and extend assistance in the delivery of international humanitarian relief, as well as ensure the safety and security of all United Nations personnel and of relief workers.

Fourthly, the international community should step up its efforts and diplomatic good offices to create conditions for a ceasefire. In that regard, we appreciate the efforts by Secretary-General Annan and his special team led by Mr. Nambiar. We support the United Nations continuing to play a significant role in that regard.

Fifthly, the Security Council should react as soon as possible to defuse the crisis in the Middle East, in order to discharge is special responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security.

The Secretary-General's briefing yesterday and the two briefings we heard this morning were indeed appalling. Mr. Siniora, Lebanon's Prime Minister, painfully warned us that Lebanon has been torn to shreds. Heads of State and Government gathered here at the United Nations last year and produced the Outcome document, which calls for the protection of civilians. Yet today we are witnessing the deaths of many civilians in bombardments and artillery shelling, as well as the fleeing of countless refugees from their homes and livelihoods. We once again strongly appeal to all the parties concerned to abide strictly by international humanitarian law, to avoid hurting innocent civilians and to provide access and assistance in the delivery of humanitarian aid. We also urge all the parties concerned to honour their commitments to ensure the safety, security and freedom of movement of United Nations personnel.

The Charter of the United Nations entrusts the Security Council with the primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security. The international community and the people of the Middle East have closely watched each and every move of the Security Council since the outbreak of the crisis there, in the expectation that the Council would promptly take effective measures to help to defuse the crisis. At this critical juncture, we hope that the Security Council will be able to live up to their expectations and react as soon as possible in order to send a strong message in a single voice.

The damage to the countries of the Middle East brought about by this crisis is enormous. Its impact on the Middle East peace process will also be long-lasting. The bloody lessons once again demonstrate that hatred and violence cannot bring about peace. They also again highlight the importance of reaching a comprehensive settlement to the crisis in the Middle East. Yesterday, Secretary-General Annan proposed a package of elements to resolve the conflict between Israel and Lebanon, which we believe can serve as a good basis. China is ready to join others to continue to improve and develop the proposals in order to create political conditions for an early end to the current crisis.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now intend to suspend the meeting. We shall resume our work at 3 p.m.

The meeting was suspended at 1.20 p.m.